

Music as a Medium for the Transmission of Traditional Values and Its Potential for Cross-Curricular Work with Primary School Students

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Abstract

In contemporary society, with its strong orientation toward the future, there is a frequent tendency to overlook fundamental values and cultural heritage – the very foundations through which individuals come to understand who they are, what they are, and where they are heading. Behavioral challenges that increasingly emerge already in the early years of primary education are often associated with difficulties in the formation of a child's, or young person's, identity. Although the *Act on Education in Primary Schools in the Republic of Croatia* (2024) clearly emphasizes that the purpose of schooling is “to ensure a systematic approach to teaching students and to encourage and enhance their intellectual, physical, aesthetic, social, moral, and spiritual development,” educational practice remains largely focused on academic subjects. Those subjects that foster aesthetic values are reduced to a minimum. As a result, primary school students typically have only one lesson per week in Music and one in Visual Arts.

The same Act (2024) further highlights that the aim of primary education is “to develop students’ awareness of national identity, the preservation of historical and cultural heritage, and national identity,” a goal that is difficult to achieve within such limited instructional time. The overall orientation reflects the paradigm of the “knowledge society,” in which knowledge, information, and innovation constitute the foundations of development. However, the development of a knowledge society also depends on creativity, which is primarily fostered through subjects that incorporate aesthetic values, such as the mother tongue (Croatian language), Music, and Visual Arts.

Cultural heritage is also addressed within the cross-curricular theme of Personal and Social Development, through which the foundations of cultural identity are shaped, universal and national values are understood, and awareness of one's own culture enables the understanding of others. Within Music education, students are introduced to traditional music as an element of Croatian culture; however, there is very limited time for a more in-depth engagement with song texts, performance practices, instruments, and related aspects (Curriculum for the Subject Music Culture in Croatia, 2019).

The primary aim of this paper is therefore to analyse Music textbooks for all eight grades of primary school in order to determine how frequently students encounter concepts such as traditional culture, cultural heritage, folk tunes, and folk songs across textbooks published by three different publishers. In addition, reading textbooks for the Croatian language (mother tongue) across all grades, also from three publishers, will be analysed to examine the extent to which elements of Croatian traditional culture, as opposed to elements of other cultures, are represented in the texts students read.

In order to explore the extent to which teachers incorporate elements of traditional culture in both subject-specific and cross-curricular teaching, as well as students’ responses to such practices, a focus group will be conducted with fifty teachers from across the Republic of Croatia. It is expected that teachers working in smaller communities more frequently integrate elements of traditional culture into both their teaching practice and extracurricular activities, and that they more often connect these elements with local customs and the broader values of traditional culture. Furthermore, it is anticipated that teachers perceive traditional culture as a valuable resource for identity formation and emphasize the need for professional development and the creation of innovative teaching materials. Such resources would present traditional culture in ways that are accessible and meaningful to contemporary generations, thereby supporting identity development, fostering an understanding of one's place within local and national contexts, and facilitating an engagement with the past as a foundation for building the future.

Keywords

Music, Croatian language, traditional culture, values, teachers, curriculum.